

Flexible working in the NHS

Definition & Principles

Throughout the programme we have been using the NHS definition of flexible working. The definition aims to support the shared and common understanding of flexible working that we need to achieve fair, equitable and consistent practice.

In the NHS we define flexible working as:

'An arrangement which supports an individual to have greater choice in when, where and how they work'

This may include changes to their working pattern, hours and role, and/or the location in which their work takes place.

Having a flexible working arrangement can help individuals to have more notification of, and predictability in, their work schedules and may facilitate greater variation in their work.

Alongside the definition, a set of principles have been developed which guide the ethos and values that should make flexible working become '*simply how we work*' in the NHS. The principles form a foundation for flexible working, giving each NHS organisation the ability to innovate and test out your local policy approaches against them, and to embed and grow strong flexible working for your own workforce.

The NHS Flexible Working Principles are:

1. Individuals should have an opportunity to request to work flexibly from day one of employment. Flexible working opportunities should be offered at all stages in a career, regardless of role, grade, or the reasons for wanting to work flexibly.
2. Not all roles are suitable for every flexible working opportunity and may not facilitate a flexible working arrangement all the time. Requests for flexible working are therefore considered on a case-by-case basis.
3. Job roles in the NHS and primary care are designed and advertised in ways that promote the most flexible appropriate working opportunities, with

organisations initiating conversations about flexible working from advert through to each stage of an individual's working life.

4. All requests for flexible working should be considered on individual merit. Managers should particularly have due regard for applications where the individual has protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010 (examples might include childcare needs, an adjustment to support a disabled member of staff, someone with a health condition or to meet religious requirements).
5. Individuals, managers and teams work together to explore the flexible working options that are available and seek a practical arrangement which supports the individual while:
 - Providing the best experience for patients/service users, their families and carers.
 - Maintaining safe, high quality, efficient services.
 - Maintaining the work-life balance of colleagues.
6. Those who have an agreed flexible working pattern should not be treated any less favourably in terms of pay rates, selection for promotion etc than colleagues who do not have a flexible working arrangement. Any adjustments to pay and benefits should be pro-rated against the fulltime working model for that role.
7. Managers look to saying 'yes' to a flexible working request whenever they can. Organisations, networks, teams and managers are encouraged to collaborate to think creatively about flexible working solutions, and trial different flexible working options to identify what works best.
8. Managers recognise that legislation enabling one flexible working request to be made in a 12-month period may not always be in harmony with the changes taking place in an individual's personal and professional life. The approach to making and granting flexible working arrangements should be a collaborative one between individuals and their manager. If an individual's first request for flexible working is declined, the individual should be supported to review their request and consider alternative arrangements consistent with any previous feedback. This approach should minimise repeated applications and the disappointment that might accompany any refusals.
9. Managers and individuals jointly agree review periods and discuss flexible working as part of annual health and wellbeing conversations, to consider whether any additional alternative arrangements are needed to meet the needs of the individual and the business.
10. As flexible working agreements (including those put in place to support parental and caring responsibilities) may be subject to change, individuals and managers should agree how any changes should be planned, communicated and implemented.